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An Exemption for CIA

THE Senate has delayed action on a bill that would prohibit federal agencies from asking their employees question about personal finances, religion, sex activities or family relationships. Request for delay came from the Central Intelligence Agency — and the agency has, it would seem, a legitimate gripe.

The CIA is excluded from some of the provisions of the bill, but not from a provision that would allow employees to bring suits in federal courts to enforce their rights. Obviously, a public trial of this nature could lead to disclosure of intelligence data. At the very least, it would expose the agency to public scrutiny — which was not the intent of Congress when it created the intelligence agency.

A second provision worrying CIA officials is one which gives employees the right to have legal counsel during disciplinary discussion with superiors. The agency argues, with justification, that this procedure would allow outside lawyers to sit in on discussion touching on confidential and highly sensitive subjects.

Sen. Sam Ervin's bill to protect federal employees from needlessly inquisitive bosses is a good measure. It should be approved by Congress. At the same time, reasonable exceptions should be made for the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency — both of which are engaged in work that demands a thorough examination of potential employees.

It should be added that Congress took the trouble to exempt its prize pet — the Federal Bureau of Investigation — from all of the bill's provisions. So why shouldn't Congress allow the CIA and the NSA the same exemption? These agencies, even more so than the FBI, deal in sensitive, confidential material. They must inquire more deeply than usual into an employee's private life, if only to protect the nation's security.

Senator Ervin, the sponsor of the bill, is opposed to the exemption of the CIA from its provisions. But what is good enough for the FBI ought to be good enough for the CIA and the NSA. And the Senate, despite Senator Ervin's objections, should act accordingly.